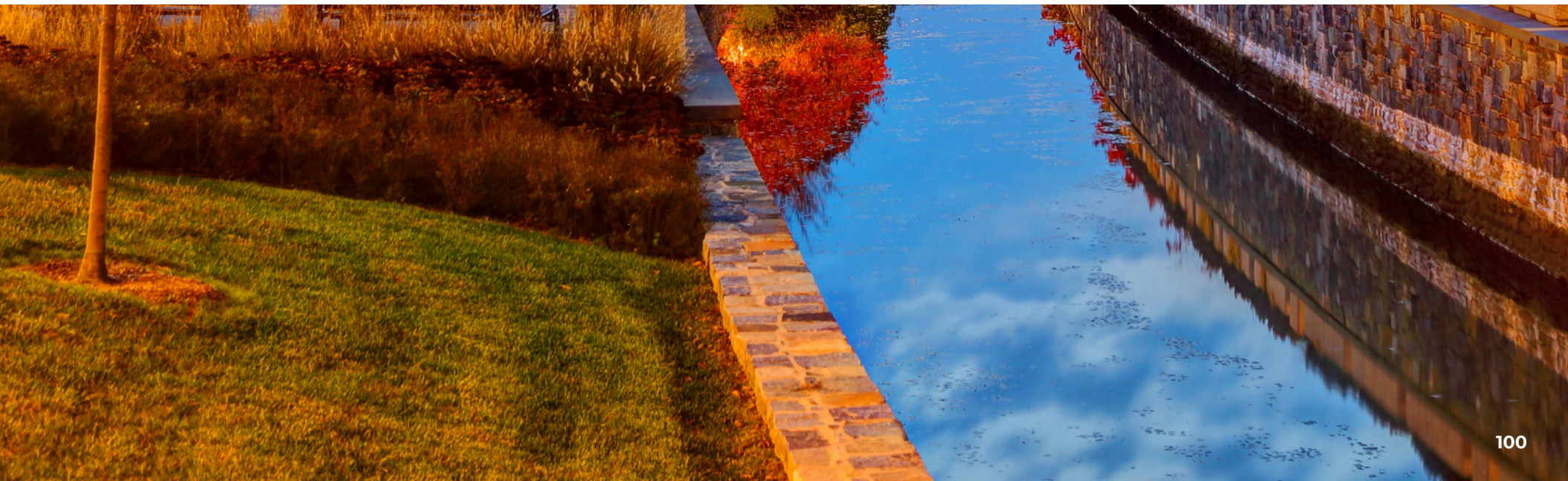




Sector 3:
**Community & Local
Government Capacity**



Background

There is a common saying that “all disasters are local.” In a similar vein, resilience efforts are most impactful when they begin locally and respond to the specific needs of communities. But not all local governments have the resources and capacity to understand their risks, scope out potential solutions, and break ground on resilience projects. Plus, disasters like flooding do not respect jurisdictional boundaries and are often best addressed through regional approaches. This sector focuses on building local capacity to support resilience efforts through local and regional collaborations that leverage shared resources and expertise.

Community and Local Government Capacity was chosen as one of the five sectors in this strategy based on a review of plans from Maryland and other states. One of the duties assigned to the Maryland Office of Resilience is to provide technical assistance, namely “assisting local agencies in their efforts to prepare and implement resilience strategies.”¹ This chapter synthesizes the resilience needs shared by local governments and proposes technical assistance options.

Definitions

Definition of the Sector: Supplying local governments with tools, expertise, and resources that build their capacity to take equitable local resilience action through planning, stormwater management, land use, community engagement, partnerships with businesses, historic and cultural resource planning, and more. Greater local capacity not only catalyzes local action, but also unlocks dollars for resilience.

Definition of Hazard: The Department of Homeland Security defines a hazard as “A source or cause of harm or difficulty.”² This term is often used to capture **acute shocks** such as hurricanes or cyberattacks.

Definition of Stressor: Stressors are chronic challenges that harm communities on blue-sky days and can make hazards more severe. This term is used to capture **ongoing or structural challenges** like persistent poverty or sea level rise.

Note that while this strategy distinguishes between hazards and stressors for the purpose of discussion, the two are deeply linked and interconnected.

Hazards

Maryland’s local governments are on the front lines of natural hazards like flooding and extreme temperatures as well as human-caused hazards such as cyber attacks that can disrupt services and strain response efforts. The hazards highlighted in this section are the ones most frequently identified by stakeholders through surveys, interviews, and work group discussions. The following pages will capture top examples of hazard impacts, but the list contained therein is not exhaustive.



Cyber-Attacks

- Local governments increasingly rely on digital infrastructure. Cloud-based platforms allow for continuity when town halls are inaccessible; digital 311 systems aggregate citizen data for rapid response; and interoperable networks let police & fire departments coordinate across jurisdictions. Likewise, cyber attacks targeting local governments are becoming increasingly common.
- Under the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), any breach involving certain types of protected personal data must be reported to the Attorney General's Office.³ Prior to 2020, the office received between 50 and 100 such reports each month.⁴ Since 2020, this number has increased to between 120 and 180 per month.
- In 2019, a ransomware attack on the Baltimore City Government cost the city an estimated 18 million dollars.⁵ More recently, a February 22, 2025 ransomware attack on Anne Arundel County government resulted in the unauthorized access of files that included personal information such as names, addresses, and medical conditions.⁶



Flooding

- Local governments often have difficulty securing funds for flood mitigation projects or risk having projects stalled due to sudden cancellation of funding on an ongoing project.⁷
- Historic flash flooding impacted Western Maryland in May 2025, especially in communities near Georges River in Allegany and Garrett counties. Governor Wes Moore declared a state of emergency during the response to this incident. Preliminary damage assessments found response costs and infrastructure damages estimated at \$33.7 million, three times higher than the State of Maryland's disaster "threshold" for Federal aid.⁸
 - Although a state of emergency was issued, the Federal Government denied Maryland's request for a presidential major disaster declaration, meaning communities have not received Federal recovery aid eligible under the Stafford Act.⁹



Extreme Temperature

- Counties across Maryland often experience increased demand for emergency services that puts strain on energy systems during long stretches of high-temperature events.¹⁰ PJM, the regional grid operator, has stated that capacity shortage could affect the regional systems by 2026 or 2027, potentially leading to brownouts and blackouts.
- Due to increased extreme temperature events, especially the increase in days of extreme heat, where temperatures rise above 95 degrees Fahrenheit, local governments throughout the state have established cooling or warming centers that allow individuals to take temporary shelter.^{11,12,13}



Tropical Systems & Severe Storms

- From 2010 to 2020, Maryland experienced 31 extreme weather events causing up to \$10 billion in damages, with costs often borne by local governments for cleanup and repairs.¹⁴
- In 2024, Tropical Storm Debbie caused major flooding in the City of Annapolis, resulting in \$162,000 in damages and prompting the city's second state of emergency that year. The storm also spurred plans for a \$50-\$60 million natural park barrier project to protect against flooding from future storms.¹⁵



Public Health Emergency

- Per the 2021 MD State Hazard Mitigation Plan, a public health emergency is defined as “an occurrence or imminent threat of a widespread illness or health conditions that pose a substantial risk of significant human fatalities or permanent/long-term disabilities.”
- Public health emergencies can stem from an endemic, epidemic, pandemic, outbreak, or contamination linked to natural hazards, as well as from biological agents or toxins that create health safety risks. Their impacts vary across populations and demographics, often disproportionately affecting uninsured individuals and rural communities, where access to healthcare, treatment, and affordable services may be more limited.
- In May 2025, flooding in Allegany County severely damaged sewer systems in the Georges Creek area, affecting nearly 20 miles of infrastructure.¹⁶ The damage caused raw sewage to flow into the water, prompting county officials to warn residents not to drink, fish, or have direct contact with the water until further notice, as exposure could lead to illness.

Long-term Stressors

In addition to the hazards described above, Maryland's communities face ongoing stressors that limit the ability of local communities and governments to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

The list on the next page includes some chief examples of these stressors.



Financial Constraints

Resilience costs money, often more than local budgets can cover on their own. For fiscal year 2024, Kent County, one of the least populated counties in the state, had an operating budget of about \$60.3 million.¹⁷ In contrast, Montgomery County, home to more than one million residents, had a recommended budget of \$ 6.8 billion.¹⁸

When state dollars fluctuate, and federal grants, like FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, are cut, local governments face an even greater challenge justifying resilience expenditures.^{19,20}

Did You Know?

In response to the damage caused by Hurricane Agnes in 1972, Maryland established the Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program (CFMGP) to allow county and municipal governments to apply for funding that would limit their share of flood mitigation project costs to 25%.²¹



Social Vulnerability

Social vulnerability refers to the "demographic and socioeconomic factors (such as poverty, lack of access to transportation, and crowded housing) that adversely affect communities that encounter hazards and other community-level stressors."²² In Maryland, the counties & cities with the highest social vulnerability index are Wicomico, Somerset, and Baltimore City.²³ Vulnerability and resilience are often correlated in that socially vulnerable communities have fewer resources to recover.²⁴

Did You Know?

Baltimore City scores within the 100th percentile of the social vulnerability index making it the most socially vulnerable jurisdiction in Maryland.²³ This is based on multiple factors: economic conditions, household makeup and disability, minority status and language barriers, and housing and transportation access.



Environmental Justice

Under Maryland law, environmental justice is defined as, "equal protection from environmental and public health hazards for all people regardless of race, income, culture, and social status."²⁵ Yet the impacts of climate change and pollution are not shared equally, with vulnerable communities facing the greatest risks while having the least access to resources.²⁶

Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. For example, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) that release harmful air pollutants are more commonly located in lower-income counties.²⁷

Public health concerns about the air quality impacts of CAFOs have been studied and monitored through a [regional partnership in the Lower Eastern Shore](#).²⁸ Similarly, in Baltimore, formerly redlined neighborhoods [also experience higher heat stress](#), up to 5.7°F hotter than the city average, largely due to limited tree canopy (canopy can reduce the urban heat island effect). A 2023 study found these neighborhoods are [nine times less likely to have large tree canopies](#).²⁹

Did You Know?

The [Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity \(VOICE\) executive order](#) establishes a unified strategy across state agencies to address inequities in environmental pollution in historically overburdened communities.³⁰

It directs Maryland agencies to expand opportunities for underrepresented farmers, advance environmental justice through agency-specific plans, and strengthen collaboration with local governments through the creation of an interagency council. VOICE also requires the use of the [MDEnviroScreen tool](#) to help agencies and communities to identify and address disparities in pollution, health, and environmental risks.³¹

Existing State Efforts

In response to these hazards and stressors, Maryland has taken the following actions thus far:



Local Hazard Mitigation Plans

Hazard mitigation planning “helps reduce the loss of life and property by [minimizing the impact](#) of disasters.”³⁵ These plans help local governments identify the natural disaster risks in their area, prioritize those risks, and develop mitigation actions as part of long-term strategies to protect people and property. Every jurisdiction in Maryland has a hazard mitigation plan, as FEMA [funding eligibility](#) depends on their adoption & approval.³⁶ The plans are updated on a five-year cycle.

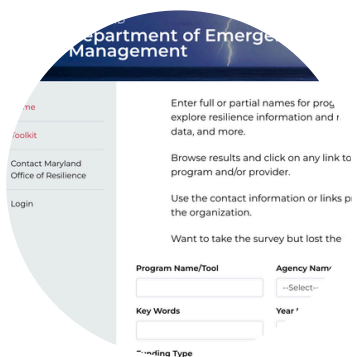
Check out some local hazard mitigation plans from each region across Maryland:

- [Allegany County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)³⁷
- [Prince George’s County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)³⁸
- [Charles County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)³⁹
- [Kent County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)⁴⁰
- [Dorchester County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)⁴¹
- [Howard County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)⁴²



Resilience Authorities

- In Maryland, [Senate Bill 457](#) authorizes local governments to establish and fund a Resilience Authority under local law. This state legislation defines a resilience authority as an “authority incorporated by one or more local governments in accordance with this title whose purpose is to undertake or support resilience infrastructure projects.”³²
- Two resilience authorities have been formally established: the Resilience Authority of Annapolis and Anne Arundel [County](#) and the Resilience Authority of Charles [County](#).^{33,34} Both are focused on addressing climate risks such as sea level rise, flooding, and stormwater management.



Resilient Maryland Toolkit

The Maryland Office of Resilience, housed within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, developed the [Maryland Resilient Toolkit](#) as a one-stop shop for resilience resources.⁴³ This searchable online database helps residents, local governments, and organizations quickly find information without being overwhelmed by scattered or hard-to-access sources. The Toolkit includes:

- Grant opportunities to fund resilience projects
- Planning initiatives that guide local action
- Mapping tools to visualize risks and solutions
- Technical assistance for implementing projects
- And much more

By reducing information barriers and centralizing resources, the Toolkit makes it easier for Maryland communities to advance resilience, equity, and preparedness.

Resilience Authority of Annapolis & Anne Arundel County

The [Resilience Authority of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County](#) is the first multi-jurisdictional resilience authority in the United States.³³

Key milestones.⁴⁴

- Securing over \$20 million in federal, state, local, and private funding in 2023 to protect Anne Arundel County’s shorelines and communities
- Completing its first project in 2024 - the restoration of the Jabez III coastal floodplain





Resilience Authority of Annapolis & Anne Arundel County (cont.)

A [full list of projects](#) is available on their website, but some notable examples include:⁴⁵

- *Resilient and Efficient Code Implementation* - This project aims to develop a model code and launch a pilot program to implement building and energy performance standards across the region.
- *Sea Level Rise Sensors (also known as Maryland Hydronet)* - This water level monitoring project will enhance data collection and improve flood monitoring to protect coastal communities. The data collected will help measure flooding impacts and support emergency management efforts, while informing broader resilience planning.
- *Annapolis City Dock* - This project will implement resilience strategies at City Dock. These improvements aim to safeguard the area's cultural heritage while also supporting its economic vitality.

Challenges & Needs

To appropriately respond to the hazards present in this sector, the following issues should be addressed:

Overburdened Local Governments Lack Resilience Planning Support

Local governments play a critical role in resilience planning and implementation, from updating building codes and land use policies, to maintaining public infrastructure and leading disaster recovery, to implementing resilience projects. However, capacity varies significantly across Maryland's 24 jurisdictions and 157 municipalities. Smaller towns, rural counties, and under-resourced communities often do not have dedicated resilience [planning or grant-writing staff](#) to complete requests for funding.⁴⁶ Many stakeholders have expressed that counties and municipalities often operate with limited personnel who manage multiple responsibilities, leaving little time or expertise for technical tasks.

Some Technical Help Available: The State offers grants for various types of technical assistance to help local governments and agencies. Examples include:

- Department of Housing and Community Development: [Technical Assistance Grant \(TAG\) Program](#)⁴⁷
- Department of Budget and Management: [Maryland Technical Assistance Program \(MTAP\)](#)⁴⁸
- Department of Environment: [Maryland Local Government Climate Action Support Program](#)⁴⁹
- Department of Natural Resources: [Watershed Assistance Grant Program](#)⁵⁰
- Department of Natural Resources: [Shoreline Erosion Technical Assistance](#)⁵¹
- Maryland Historical Trust: [Weather It Together](#)⁵²

Translating Available Tools & Data into Action

While local governments have access to a wide array of federal and state tools, datasets, and planning guides for resilience, the sheer volume of resources can be overwhelming. More importantly, the availability of information does not always translate into actions that produce meaningful outcomes for communities. This disconnect raises two critical questions:

1. How do we bridge the gap between data and action?
2. And how do we identify when data needs remain unmet?

The answers to these questions may vary across jurisdictions. Some local governments may have access to relevant data but lack the staff capacity or technical expertise to interpret and apply it effectively in planning and decision-making. Other jurisdictions may instead find that the data available to them is not sufficiently localized to address their needs.

These observations underscore the importance of looking beyond the availability of data to ask what kinds of support, partnerships, and approaches are needed to help jurisdictions put information into practice.

Beyond the Data - Coastal Preparedness: The CoastSmart Communities Initiative helps coastal jurisdictions prepare for and respond to threats such as coastal flooding, storm surge, and sea level rise.⁵³ A key resource used in this initiative is the Maryland Coastal Flood Explorer, which provides data on past, present, and projected flooding down to the ZIP code.⁵⁴

More than just a data source, the initiative provides a structured process for turning information into action. It helps local governments use available data to identify at-risk assets, then translate this understanding into action by updating and adopting planning processes that better strengthen coastal resilience. DNRs's "understand, plan, and implement" strategy serves as an example of how providing planning and implementation support can help local governments better utilize data, tools, and resources to produce meaningful outcomes.

**** End of Sector Analysis ****

Goals & Recommendations

Community & Local Government Capacity



GOAL 1 - Establish regionally-based technical assistance to help local jurisdictions advance resilience.

Recommendation 1.1

Establish a resilience technical assistance pilot in one or more regions of the state.

Owner: MDEM-MOR **Timeline:** 2 years **Funding:** Funding needs TBD. MOR currently has multiple applications pending to fund this pilot.

Focus Area: Justice & Equity, Robust Economy & Job Creation

Why This Matters:

- Across Maryland's 23 counties, 157 municipalities, and one independent city, there are significant variations in budget, number of personnel, and expertise on staff.
- As a result, many local jurisdictions lack dedicated resilience planning and grant writing staff.⁴⁷
- By creating a technical assistance program at the regional level, the Maryland Office of Resilience can fill these gaps and create better resilience outcomes.
- An initial pilot will establish a process that can be scaled to other geographies in the future.

Recommendation 1.2

Expand regional technical assistance to all regions of the state to accelerate multi-jurisdictional collaboration, development of project pipelines, and establishment of resilience authorities.

Owner: MDEM-MOR **Timeline:** 5 years **Funding:** Funding needs TBD, will be determined by the cost of the pilot.

Focus Area: Justice & Equity, Robust Economy & Job Creation

Why This Matters:

- Disasters do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. Regional approaches enable more effective large-scale projects, resource sharing, and economies of scale.
- Recognizing this, states are increasingly establishing regional technical assistance programs that help local governments assess risks and identify projects.⁵⁵
- Technical assistance yields dividends by better positioning communities for future funding. New Jersey's Resilient NJ program led to \$26.3 million in federal funding for project implementation.⁵⁶

GOAL 2 - Provide tools and guidance that increase local capacity to plan, fund, and implement resilience efforts.



Recommendation 2.1

Develop and share tools that support the creation of resilience authorities across the state and increase local financing capacity.

Owner: MDEM-MOR

Timeline: 2 years

Funding: Funding needs TBD. A version is possible with existing resources; MOR also has an application pending to support this effort.

Focus Area: Robust Economy & Job Creation

Why This Matters:

- In Maryland, because of [Senate Bill 457](#), local jurisdictions can establish resilience authorities, which can issue bonds, apply for and administer funding, and operate more nimbly than local governments.⁵⁷
- The [Resilience Authority of Anne Annapolis and Arundel County](#) and [Resiliency Authority of Charles County](#) serve as two successful examples that have increased local financing capacity.^{33,34}
- Because this is a novel governance structure, local jurisdictions would benefit from tools and templates to guide their decision process and aid in structuring these entities.

Recommendation 2.2

Develop best practices for local capital improvement planning that incorporate natural and human-caused hazards as well as climate projections.

Owner: MDEM-MOR

Timeline: 5 years

Funding: TBD

Focus Area: Robust Economy & Job Creation

Why This Matters:

- Local governments [utilize capital improvement plans](#) to manage long-term investments in public infrastructure.⁵⁸
- It is an emerging best practice to link capital improvement plans with climate adaptation and disaster resilience, considering sea level rise, increased precipitation, and other future risks when siting and designing infrastructure.
- The City of Baltimore is a leader in this regard, linking its Capital Improvement Plan to its Disaster Preparedness Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Sustainability Plan.

Recommendation 2.3

Pilot mechanisms to compensate community liaisons for their time and expertise weighing in on resilience projects.

Owner: DNR

Timeline: 5 years

Funding: No additional funding needed

Focus Area: Justice & Equity



Why This Matters:

- Equitable community engagement is a cornerstone of environmental justice. To achieve that, it is essential to honor community knowledge.
- On Maryland's Eastern Shore, Envision the Choptank has successfully partnered with community ambassadors to more effectively engage with communities and understand local priorities.⁵⁹
- To do this properly, the State needs mechanisms to compensate community liaisons.

Recommendation 2.4

Scale the practice of compensating community liaisons across state agencies and resilience programs.

Owner: TBD

Timeline: 10 years

Funding: TBD

Focus Area: Justice & Equity

Why This Matters:

- Once DNR has established and piloted mechanisms to compensate community liaisons and engage them in resilience project development, this practice can be scaled across agencies and programs to institutionalize equitable co-governance and environmental justice.

GOAL 3 - Protect and rapidly restore small business operations statewide.

Recommendation 3.1

Provide technical assistance for small businesses to prepare for and respond to disruptions, including updates to and implementation of a robust Small Business Continuity and Resiliency Playbook.

Owner: COMM

Timeline: 2-5 years

Funding: No additional funding needed

Focus Area: Justice & Equity, Robust Economy & Job Creation

Why This Matters:

- Small businesses are particularly vulnerable to disasters, and 99.6% of Maryland's businesses are small businesses.⁶⁰
- An estimated 75% of businesses without a continuity plan fail within three years of being struck by a disaster.⁶¹
- The Maryland Department of Commerce has developed a Small Business Continuity and Resiliency Playbook to build the resilience of small businesses across the state.

**** End of Sector Recommendations ****

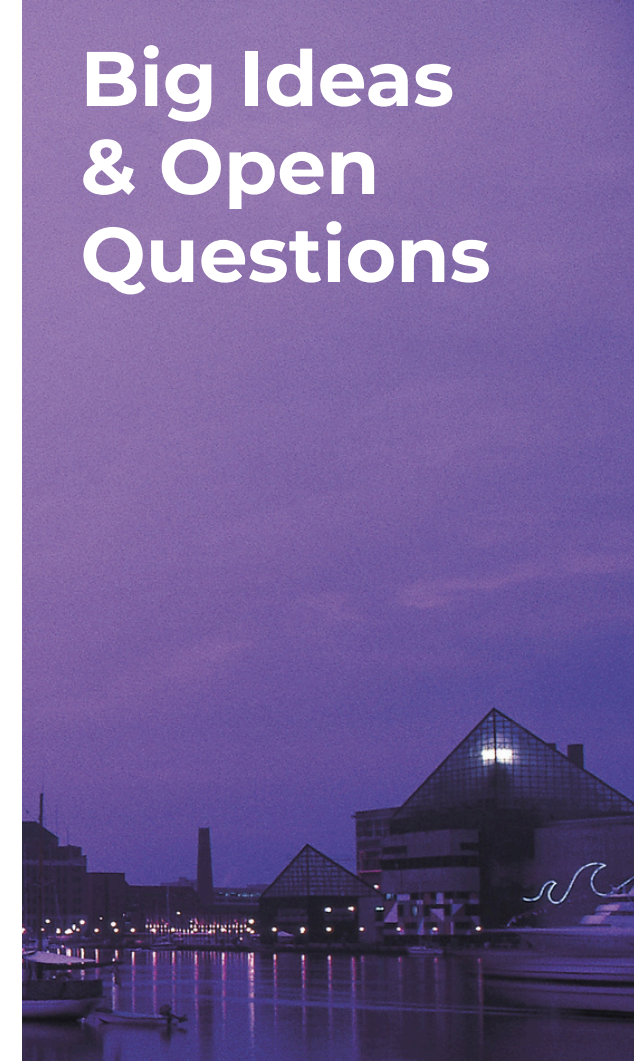
Coordination Across Jurisdictional Boundaries

Watersheds, transportation networks, and energy systems frequently span multiple counties or municipalities, yet planning and investment decisions are often made independently at the local level. To bridge this gap, jurisdictions can be encouraged to pursue projects that address broader geographic areas through tools such as joint procurement vehicles, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), or other legal structures that enable cross-jurisdictional collaboration. For example, many Maryland state agencies use MOUs with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to carry out work in designated critical areas.^{62,63}

In addition, existing regional entities provide valuable frameworks for coordination. The Tri-County Councils (TCCs), established to promote regional planning, economic development, and intergovernmental cooperation, are strong resources for facilitating collaboration.

Maryland has active TCCs for the Lower Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland, and Western Maryland.^{64,65,66} Other notable entities include the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), which unites 24 jurisdictions across Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., as well as the Baltimore Metropolitan Council, which serves as the council of governments for six Maryland counties and Baltimore City.^{67,68} These entities provide valuable infrastructure, capacity, and cross-jurisdictional coordination to support the advancement of planning and policy for local governments.

Big Ideas & Open Questions



Legislative Progress Whole Watershed Act

Addressing boundary-spanning issues such as water quality requires coordinated action across multiple scales. Regional initiatives that cross jurisdictional boundaries not only strengthen restoration efforts but also create opportunities for communities to share knowledge and learn from one another.

In 2024, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Whole Watershed Act, establishing a collaborative, science-based approach to watershed restoration.⁶⁹ The law created a five-year program targeting five watersheds that together represent Maryland's diverse land uses, geographies, and environmental challenges.⁷⁰ These projects bring together community organizations, local governments, private firms, and other partners to pilot innovative restoration strategies.

Need for Community & Public Involvement

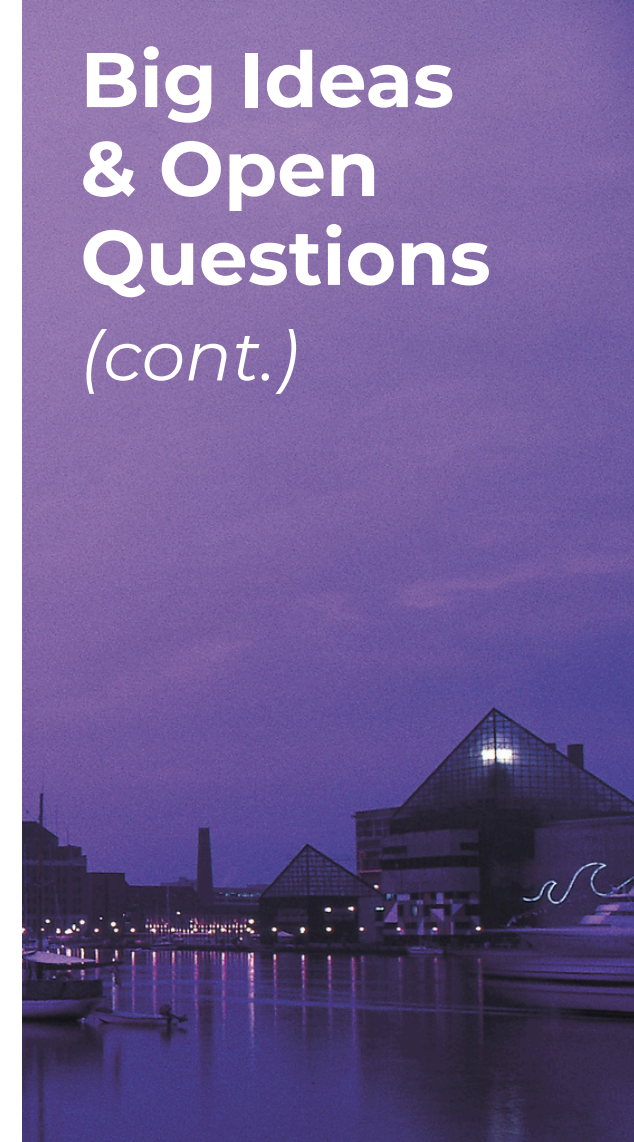
Meaningful community engagement goes beyond simply holding public meetings - it requires building trust and creating genuine opportunities for input. This means providing various feedback methods that are convenient and accessible, using clear and plain language, and offering honoraria to acknowledge the value of participants' time & expertise.

Equally important is timing. Input gathered only at the end of a process, when decisions are already made, has little impact. Engagement should begin early and continue throughout, allowing communities to shape outcomes rather than react to them. While residents may not need to weigh in on technical modeling details, they can play a critical role in validating model results with lived experience, identifying community priorities, and assessing policy alternatives.

In June 2023, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) released Maryland's Climate Pathways Report. Ahead of completing the full plan, MDE actively sought robust public input over a six-month outreach period to gather community feedback.⁷¹ Interested parties provided that feedback through multiple channels, including online comment forms, letters, phone calls, and direct conversations with MDE staff at public listening sessions. This feedback directly supported the development of the State's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, published December 2023.

Developing policies and projects in partnership with those most affected by hazards, with accessible and timely opportunities for community input, ensures that resilience strategies are not only more relevant but also more trusted and effective.

Big Ideas & Open Questions (cont.)



Local Success Story Baltimore City Community Resilience Hub Program

The Baltimore City Community Resiliency Hub Program serves as an example of where emergency preparedness meets resilience building efforts.⁷² This program turns established and trusted community sites, where people already gather, into hubs where residents can not only find shelter during an emergency but also receive accurate, up-to-date information about their local community.

These hubs, along with other similar public-facing sites, provide valuable opportunities to share information and gather feedback on ongoing resilience planning and projects.



Envision the Choptank Community Ambassador Program

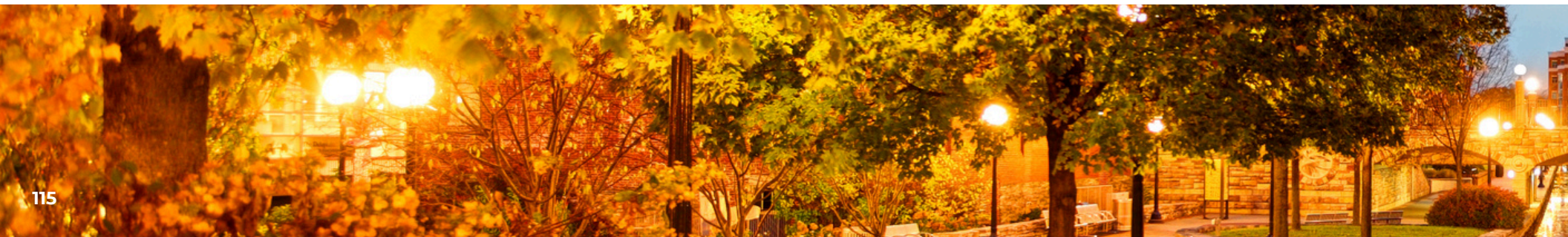
Envision the Choptank (Envision) is a regional coalition that unites community groups, conservation districts, landowners, nonprofits, and government agencies at all levels to pursue shared goals of cleaner, swimmable, and fishable waters across the Choptank watershed.⁷³ This watershed spans across Talbot, Dorchester, Caroline, and Queen Anne's counties in Maryland and Kent County in Delaware.

Recognizing the need to build trust and foster dialogue with historically disenfranchised communities, Envision launched the Community Ambassador Program, supported by a dedicated Community Ambassador Fund that compensates local leaders for serving as the voice of their communities.⁷⁴ Ambassadors ensure community perspectives are represented in decision-making while also identifying pressing issues and potential solutions.

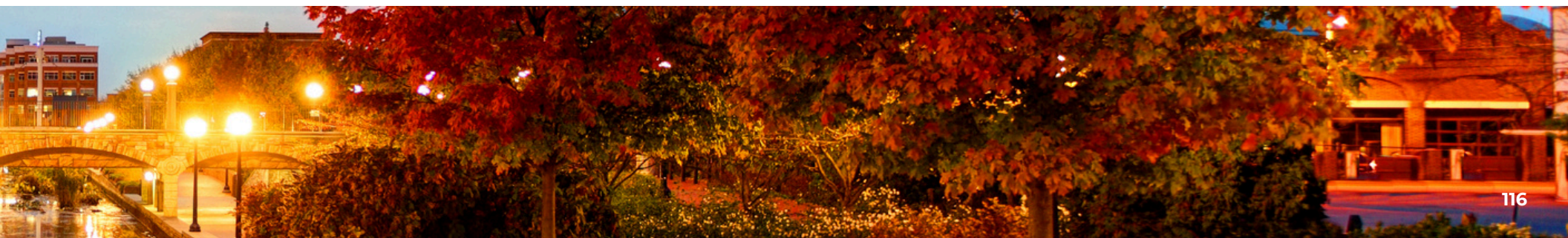
Their role centers on two-way communication: Ambassadors gather local concerns and priorities, and Envision responds with tools and resources such as MyCoast for real-time flood documentation, along with technical assistance in project scoping, proposal development, and grant management through a circuit rider program. By strengthening existing networks and relationships, the program connects communities to resources, builds local capacity, and fosters collaboration to advance resilience and environmental goals.

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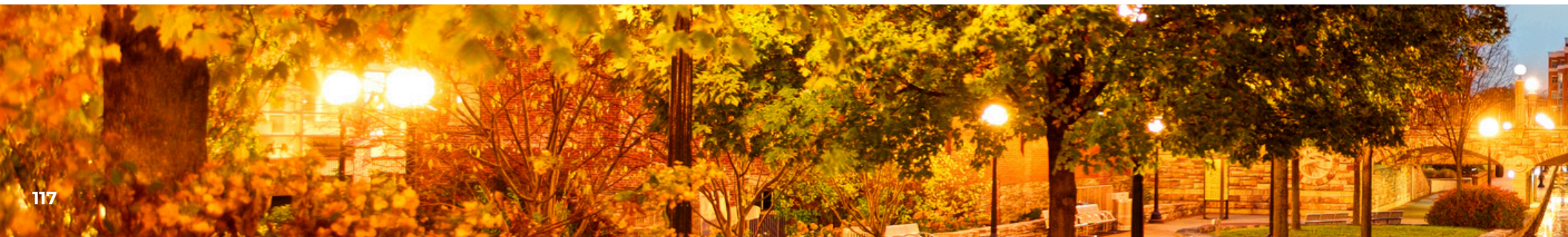
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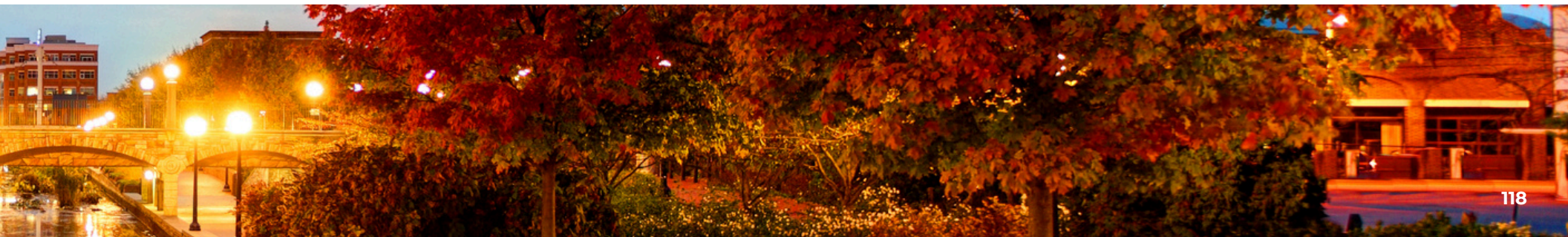
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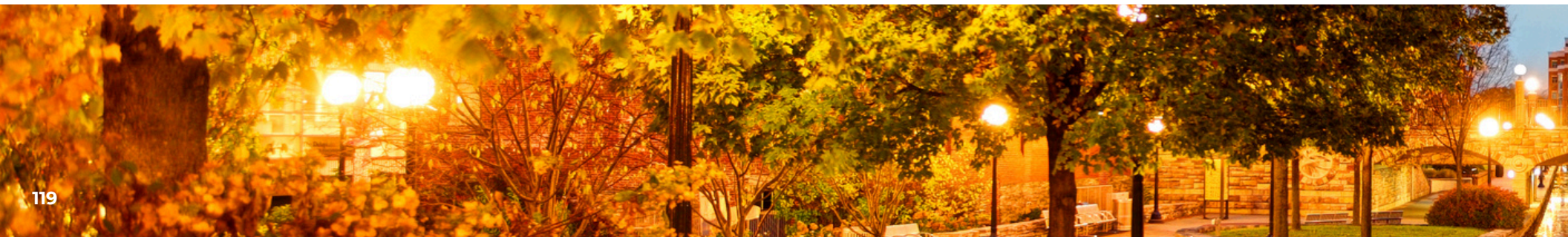
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